

Another year begun. Another year. And if I could afford a drop of whiskey in which to drink a toast, it should be, "May this be the last New Year I shall ever live to see." I'm tired of life. Life! This isn't life; it's a living death. For twelve months I've been lying a maimed hideous, useless thing, 'most always in pain, and earning just enough to keep my miserable body from being put decently under the churchyard mould. And little more than a year ago I was a strong, handsome, hearty fellow, the pride of our travelling company, the Lion King. How the spectators used to tremble and shiver when I unbarred the door and walked into the lion's cage! And how the great beasts would crouch and look at me like dogs that knew their master! And how some of the women 'ud squeak with fright! God! there's not a mouse so faint-hearted as to be afraid of me now, I haven't the nerve to put my head down on a cat as once I used to on those lions, and I could force upon their jaws, and hold my hand between them without my pulses going one beat the faster. We were a tolerably good company, taking us all round. I suppose there'll never be anything more done in the way of horsemanship than has been in these years past. There's bound to be the jumping over banners and through paper hoops, and the cleverest equestrienne can't make her trained steed dance on less than two legs. Well, our women were active and good-looking, and our clowns funny, and we were mostly young and enjoyed our strolling life and enjoyment of one's business goes far to making the onlookers enjoy it too. It seems to me now as if it must be some other chap I'm talking about; as if it couldn't ever have been me that cared for so many things—the smell of the sawdust, the cheers of the people, a drink with a jolly companion, a kiss from a pretty woman. Of course people will say I brought my fate on myself, that I'd no right to try to control those savage beasts and think I could be their master. "He'll do it once to often," folk said, as folk do say, stupid things a thousand times, and if they are wrong 999 times and right once they think how clever they are. But they were wrong about me, although I'm a maimed, scared, wretched cripple now. I knew my work. I could master the lions. It wasn't my fault and it wasn't the beasts' fault that I lost my power over them once; it was the fault of a woman—God bless her—the sweetest and tenderest creature I ever breathed. God bless her wherever she is! and grant she may never know what's happened to me through her.

From that day each had a similar experience to relate. Each had been addressed by the gentle-faced Methodist, and exhorted with good words. Some were angry; some treated the affair as a good joke, and pretended to be much impressed, sang psalms through their noses and ribald sonnets with serious words. When my own turn came I didn't laugh or scorn. The girl was so young, so pretty, earnest in her wish to do good, that I listened with hearty respect. She told me she was only in 8—on a visit that her people lived in a quiet village in Kent, and she did not like the busy town of 8—, with its drinking, smoking, its Sabbath-breaking, its vain amusements. She was trying to do what good lay in her power, as she always tried, wherever she might be. She read and talked to the work-visited the sick and sorrowful, lectured in her pretty, homely fashion those whose way of life did not please her. We met often and talked, and used to look out for her in the place where I knew she was likely to be; and once I was able to save her from some rough, rude folk, who were gray at her interference. But her words didn't seem to hurt her, as might have thought they would, so refined and gentle. Her modesty and purity were so perfect that they formed a shield through which brutality couldn't penetrate. Often when I went amongst our people after long

"She spoke in a hurried way, and I saw her cheek was flushed and her eyes moistened with tears. I didn't answer; I couldn't. I suppose she thought I was sulky, and I went on more pleadingly:

"If you knew now I have reproached myself, I'm sure you would forgive me. How can I expect God to love me when I spurn in such a fashion the love of one of His creatures? (I was) I was horribly rude and ungracious and I don't wonder you are angry with me."

"Angry?" I tried to speak calmly.

When a young man walks with a girl as though he was afraid some one would see him, the girl is his sister. If he walks so close to her as to nearly crowd her against the fence, she is some one else's sister.

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